

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

Evening Parade with Guest of Honor Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta

**General James F. Amos,
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GENERAL JAMES AMOS: Ladies and gentlemen, we're on an adjusted schedule tonight and thanks for your patience. We have probably 3 or 4,000 folks sitting in the bleachers out there, but you've been able to eat and have something to drink so your life has been good for the last little bit. We're particularly pleased to have you in the home of the Commandants, the oldest continuously lived in home in Washington, DC. We're celebrating the War of 1812 this year, and you'll notice that this home survived. It was built in 1801, and the British -- the way the Marines tell the story -- the British failed to burn this house in honor of the great war fighting prowess of the United States Marines. Ooh-rah! Even if that's not true, it's a great story, and I'll perpetuate it forever.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are particularly honored tonight. Secretary Panetta and his lovely wife, Sylvia, just landed. They landed probably about 45 minutes ago, raced here from California, and came to join us tonight. The truth of the matter is you're not here to see me; you're here to see Secretary Panetta. I am acutely aware of that, especially by the laundry list of everybody that was just honored. But we're awfully pleased you're here. Secretary Panetta is our 23rd Secretary of Defense of the United States of America. There's a host of things I'd love to tell you, but let me just encapsulate it in a couple of comments.

You know, you talk about service to our Nation, and those of us that wear our cloth and wear the cloth of our Nation, our fellow Nations, our allies and those of you that have worn the cloth of this nation, have an appreciation for what it means to serve. Nobody that I'm aware of has served with greater distinction, dignity, honor, faithfulness and a term that we call "fidelity" in the Marine Corps. Nobody has served with greater fidelity to our Nation than Mr. Leon Panetta. He was a member of Congress ... he was an Army Captain, so that gives him a lot of street credibility in the Department of Defense as our Secretary of Defense. He was an Army Captain from '64 to '66, he served as a member of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1993. If you think about that, our Nation is about to go through elections. We have several members of the House of Representatives here tonight, and every two years we elect all the members of the House of Representatives and a portion of our Senators. He was the Chief of Staff for President Bill Clinton, as well as a host of other jobs in between to include the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. If you think about where we are with our nation right now and especially the Department of Defense and all the fiscal pressures, we've got nobody more seasoned to lead us through these times than our current Secretary of Defense.

But ladies and gentlemen, I think from my perspective as a military man, probably the greatest moment -- and I would suspect from Secretary Panetta's life and I'll let him verify that in a minute when he takes the microphone -- is the night he sat with our current President and the senior leadership for our country, as they sat in the Situation Room, and he fulfilled the promise he made to the President of the United States when he said, "I'll double-down on trying to catch Osama Bin Laden." Ladies and gentlemen, the 23rd Secretary of Defense, the man who brought down Osama Bin Laden, Secretary Leon Panetta.